

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ASUNCI 02778 062150Z

61

ACTION SCCT-01

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SY-05 SCS-03 SCA-01 DHA-02

IO-13 AID-05 PC-01 /078 W

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O 062115Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7791

INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 2778

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ASEC, PA

SUBJ: TWO US MISSIONARIES KIDNAPPED AND FREED

REF: ASUNCION 1947

1. TWO U.S. CITIZEN MORMON MISSIONARIES, THAYNE LARSON, 26, AND PETER ALLEN SHAW, 21, WERE KIDNAPPED NEAR POSADAS, ARGENTINA, ON JUNE 26, AND TAKEN ACROSS THE PARANA RIVER TO A HUT NEAR ENCARNACION, PARAGUAY. ACTING ON A TIP-OFF, PARAGUAYAN POLICE RAIDED THE HUT ON JUNE 30, TAKING THE ABDUCTORS AND THE MISSIONARIES INTO CUSTODY. ONE MISSIONARY WAS SHOT BY MISTAKE DURING THE RAID, BUT WAS NOT SERIOUSLY WOUNDED. BOTH MISSIONARIES WERE SET FREE ON JULY 3 AND REPORTEDLY HAVE RETURNED TO ARGENTINA.

2. RANSOM NOTE LEFT WITH LOCAL ELDER OF MORMON CHURCH, DEMANDED \$1.5 MILLION FOR RELEASE OF MISSIONARIES. NOTE WAS SIGNED BY ORGANIZACION POLITICA MILITAR (OPM), A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION
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PAGE 02 ASUNCI 02778 062150Z

FIRST DISCOVERED BY POLICY LAST APRIL TO BE

OPERATING IN PARAGUAY. (SEE REFTEL FOR SUMMARY OF APRIL TERRORIST EPISODE.) CHIEF OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE HAS CONFIRMED TO DEFATT THAT ABDUCTORS WERE OPM ACTIVISTS OF BOTH PARAGUAYAN AND ARGENTINE NATIONALITY. THEY ARE IN CUSTODY IN ENCARNACION AND POLICE INVESTIGATIONS CONTINUE.

3. EMBASSY FIRST LEARNED OF INCIDENT JULY 3 WHEN CARL B. PRATT OF MONTEVIDEO, WHO DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS ATTORNEY FOR THE MORMON CHURCH IN THE SOUTHERN CONE COUNTRIES, CAME TO THE EMBASSY TO INFORM US OF THE SITUATION. AT THAT TIME, MISSIONARIES WERE STILL BEING HELD FOR QUESTIONING. EMBASSY RAISED THE MATTER FOLLOWING DAY WITH INTERIOR MINISTER UNDER SECRETARY BESTARD, URGING THAT THE MISSIONARIES BE RELEASED. EMBASSY OFFICER TRAVELLED TO ENCARNACION JULY 5, AND FOUND MISSIONARIES WERE SET FREE JULY 3 AND HAD ALREADY RETURNED TO ARGENTINA. HE QUESTIONED LOCAL SECURITY OFFICIALS WORKING ON THE CASE WHO CONFIRMED FACTS IN PARAS 1 AND 2 ABOVE. THEY SAID INTERROGATION REVEALED RANSOM WAS INTENDED FOR PURCHASE OF ARMS FROM FRANCE.

4. COMMENT: IN VIEW OF CONFIRMATION BY VARIETY OF SOURCES, ACCOUNT OF EVENTS DESCRIBED ABOVE APPEARS TO BE TRUE. IF SO, FURTHER EVIDENCE THAT THE OPM OPERATIONS CONTINUE IN PARAGUAY TENDS TO LEND CREDENCE TO HEIGHTENED CONCERN OF PARAGUAYAN SECURITY OFFICIALS, WHO ARE ALREADY VERY NERVOUS FOLLOWING DISCOVERY OF OPM AND ASSASSINATION OF URUGUAYAN AMBASSADOR. IN LIGHT OF ATTACK ON AMERICANS, PERSONNEL.
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